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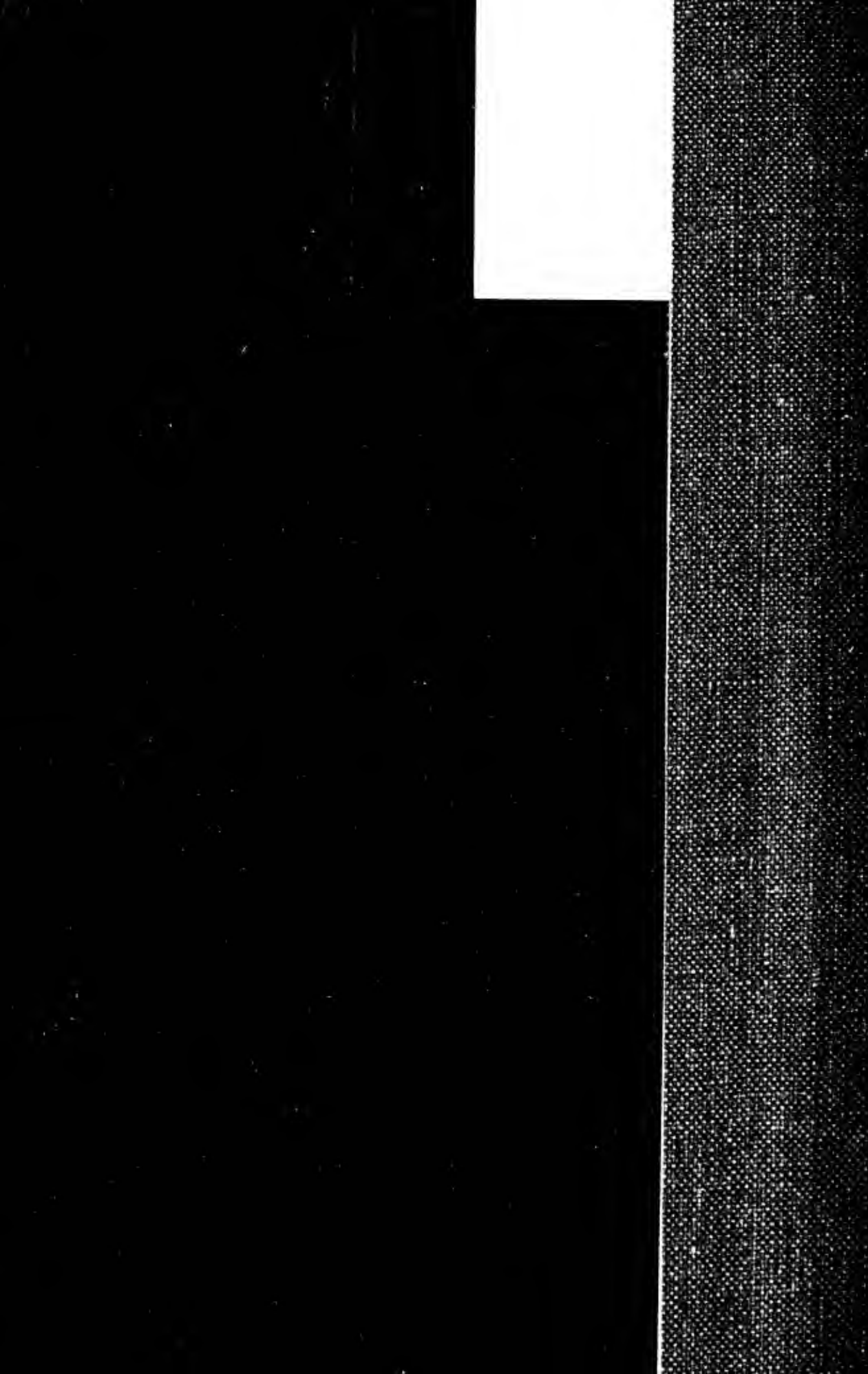


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NOTES
RAPHS

CITIZEN OF
HE TWILIGHT



UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

BRYN MAWR NOTES
AND MONOGRAPHS

IV

A CITIZEN OF
THE TWILIGHT

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BRYN MAWR NOTES
AND MONOGRAPHS
IV

A CITIZEN OF THE TWILIGHT

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A CITIZEN OF THE TWILIGHT

JOSÉ ASUNCIÓN SILVA

By

GEORGIANA GODDARD KING, M.A.

Professor of the History of Art in Bryn Mawr College
Member of the Hispanic Society of America



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JOSÉ A. SILVA

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A CITIZEN OF THE TWILIGHT

"BOGOTA is a city of the Andes, 8000 feet above the sea. There the atmosphere is cold and dry. The air is delicate: the sky is of disconcerting purity and transparency. Forty or fifty miles away the profile of the mountains stands out brilliant and glittering, as in *ombres chinoises*. Under this light, colour becomes provisional: soft tones become sharp, keen tones become half-tones. Neither black nor white can resist the light; the black takes a greenish tinge immediately, the white is spoiled by shades of grey. In this dry and rarefied air," continued Silva, "always at the same temperature, the nerves are in constant tension." Here is neither summer nor winter, but always chill and sun, or drizzling mist and dragging skirts of cloud: there are no long nights of winter, no long summer days, for night and day are alike the year around; and always it is either day or night, for there is no twilight in the courts of the sun. To the rest of the world it would seem life

No twilight

in the
courts of
the sun

BRYN MAWR NOTES

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2	A CITIZEN OF
Tension	<p>there must be in itself abnormal, exacting, troubled. For the poet who gave this account of his own land, the tension of the nerves was torture, and in the end they snapped.</p> <p>Silva was a citizen of the twilight. There are many sorts of pessimism, and not all pessimists have haunted the City of Dreadful Night. This younger brother of Leopardi and James Thomson is determined by his temperament toward a sort of twilight land, a land of shadows and voices, vague forms that pass, shades that elude the grasp, fluttering moths and fleeting echoes, where the dark is but dimness, the nights are full of murmurings, perfumes and music of wings.</p>
Culture	<p>José Asuncion Silva was born on the 27th of October, in 1865; and at the age of thirty he shot himself: on May 24th, 1896. His father, D. Ricardo Silva, was a cultivated man, whose friends were poets and savants, journalists, orators, or else connoisseurs of literature. Jorge Isaacs was a familiar of the house. The literary atmosphere of Bogota, as recalled by those</p>
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who breathed it, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, suggests that of Edinburgh in the first. Don Ricardo himself wrote little essays of which his club thought well. He was a man of taste, and apparently of heart: his son was to mourn him. Brought up in the best society of Bogota, educated like other gentlemen's sons, now at one school and now at another, and at last quitting school definitively because of his interest in books, José went to France on a journey with his father which had business as its excuse but resulted in a swifter and richer maturing of his genius than if he had been sent there to study. To Paris in those days all South America, like Italy, like England, looked for ideals of art, for idols in letters, for the wind of inspiration, whereby the Muse became a Pythoness. He made the acquaintance and felt the power of Jean Richepin, but the strongest influence upon his style was less any one man's than, rather, that of a school, the *Symboliste*. He came home not so much changed as formed.

He will have been what old women call

and travel

4	A CITIZEN OF
<p>A gentle child</p> <p>A good son and brother</p>	<p>a nursery child; not unkind to the dolls, or alien to his little sister's pleasure at bringing in a cocoon and laying it up to wait for the butterfly; content with the fairy-tale and the singing-game, satisfied with books, hushed and exalted by the First Communion. Certain poems are steeped in the atmosphere of a sheltered life at home, the warm sweetness and safety of the nursery, the lamp-light, the drawn curtain, and the far-off sounds from the street.</p> <p>He was about twenty-three when Don Ricardo died, leaving his affairs in a sad state, and José as eldest son took up the business in the hope of paying off the debts. His mother's beauty and brilliancy and worldly gifts, the rare loveliness and charm of his sister Elvira, the little ones, still in the nursery, for the three brothers in between had died in infancy—all these were but so many irresistible demands upon him, constituted rights for so many helpless people. Thenceforth he looked on his literary preoccupations as a sort of criminal vice, to be hidden from all but his friends.</p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

In this episode of the business and its matter of course, appears a trait entirely American, setting him off from others of his temperament whose tragical lives were determined by their troubled spirits, Leopardi and James Thomson. Only in our hemisphere may a man combine the functions of a shopkeeper and a gentleman. Leopardi was a man of rank, and though he was much put to it at times for means of subsistence, he could earn none except by teaching or writing; Thomson was born in the lower middle class and could not be admitted to the conversation or personal consideration of what are technically called gentlemen; but Silva, like his father, moved among the best people, in a capital, while dealing in dry goods and notions. Out of the necessities of his trade he drew material for romance, and the list of his importations reads like what came to Solomon in the ships of Hiram king of Tyre: silks from Jirganor, jars from China, Murano glass, Atkinson's perfumes, and Lalique jewellery.

His poems meanwhile were handed

A shop-
keeper

6	A C I T I Z E N O F
A poet	<p>about in manuscript, copied, recopied, and miscopied; learned by heart, recited, and repeated, as fast as written, in the literary clubs of Bogota. Some came out in newspapers and provincial Illustrated Weeklies, some were never published and were reconstructed after his death from scraps of paper and half-forgotten recollections in the memory of his intimates.</p> <p>Like Tennyson, Silva himself could remember and recite what he had composed: his voice was fine with rare beauty of timbre, his cadences were rich and well adapted, the magic of his poetry was extraordinary. He had, moreover, great personal charm, with the especial friendly and gentle grace which is confined usually to those who have been delicate as children, or for some reason have needed more care and caressing than most—the indisposition to hurt anything alive. Personal beauty as marked as Byron's but graver, appears in his portrait and in reminiscence of him. The great pale brow, the great chestnut beard, the great luminous eyes, are all romantic and <i>maladif</i>. He was ex-</p>
Personal charm	
IV	B R Y N M A W R N O T E S

pressly fashioned, as his friend Sanin Cano was to say, for an exquisite instrument of suffering. The sister nearest to his own age seems to have supplied in these years what he most craved, the complete understanding, the intimacy, in a certain sense the protection, rarely to be found except within the bounds of kindred. Some other experience he had at this time of what the name of love also includes: "a sordid business in which he became, against his will, the central figure." but which left him unspoiled.

The hearth

The handful of poems that are called *Gotas Amargas*, Bitter Drops, which were the outcome chiefly of the experience, he would never consent to print, but indeed they contain nothing that he needed to regret, except youth. Grossness is not there, coarseness is rare, and, like a boy's smoking, studied rather than instinctive. Throughout his short time of working, the verses upon sentimental themes are aloof, ironic, and indifferent. It would almost appear that the only love he knows in a strength which can be called passion, is

8	A CITIZEN OF
<i>Fin de siècle</i>	<p>that of kindred: mother and daughter, brother and sister, betrothed or wedded lovers. The sanctity of the hearth is over all. Even in the <i>Gotas Amargas</i> the satirical impulse very soon yields to the mere malady of living; his Lazarus, who when the Saviour raised him had wept for joy, four months later was found in the place of tombs, weeping alone and envying the dead.</p> <p>The malady of the century's end was his. "When you come at your last hour, to your last lodging," so he concludes a longish piece, finely chiselled, called <i>Philosophies</i>, "you will feel the killing anguish of having done nothing." It would be a mistake, however, to diagnose this disease as the same with Leopardi's; it is not the futility of accomplishment which besets him, but the impossibility. As his doctor pronounces in <i>El Mal de Siglo</i>, "What ails you is hunger"—the famished need for all that is out of reach and then, furthermore, for all that the constitution of this particular world denies. "Sacrifice yourself to art, combine, refine, carve, toil on.</p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

strive, and into the labour that is killing you—canvas, bronze or poem—put your essence, your nerves, your whole soul. Terrible vain emprise! The day after tomorrow your work will be out of fashion.” The trouble here lies not in the nature of things but in the perversity of life.

What ailed him was hunger. Like other young men of parts, ardent and ambitious, he was dazzled and dizzied by the unguessed possibilities of the universe. The immense spectacle of human knowledge, of modern science, of speculative thought, burst upon him; and for him as for how many, Herbert Spencer’s *First Principles* was like the draught of Lucretius. As they overpassed the flaming ramparts of the world, as they watched the atoms dropping through the void and saw the stars whirling through infinitude, as they felt the enormous cosmical process knit up into worlds and dissolve again through recurrent eternities, the burning concepts scorched the brain, the swelling apprehensions with which it ached “made havoc among those tender cells.” Like his

The cosmic
spectacle

10	A CITIZEN OF
Sudden death	<p>friends, who, what with books and what with talk, had come to this new light, had shared with him this all but intolerable initiation, he had to unlearn old notions and acquire new ones. Others took it lighter. In their study, as one of them says, they gained, in default of other knightly discipline, a diversion and a noble aim. He plunged into Herbert Spencer and found, or fancied, that he must learn mechanics, natural history, chemistry, ethnography and the exact sciences. What for his companions was an orgy of acquisition, was torture for him. Business pressed him, his family claimed him, and society, and life.</p> <p>Misfortune was to come again: suddenly, in a January night, his sister died of a malady of the heart. When she was dressed for the grave, he covered her body with lilies and roses, drenching it with perfume, and turned every one else out of the room except a single friend. As he stayed there long in silence, in the very profound of grief he found his anodyne.</p> <p>Then he was for a time Secretary of</p>
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Legation at Caracas. Returning thence he was wrecked in the *Amérique*, off the coast, and lost a set of sonnets that he was used to speak of as *my jewels*. For nearly ten years, now, he had borne the distress that mere living involved, the pressure of cruel care, and a more cruel spiritual dryness. He wrote once to a lady:

“Counselled in these hours of spiritual aridity by my lay confessor, an old psychologist, who keeps in his cell for sole ornament a copy of Albert Dürer’s *Melancholia*, and who knows to the bottom the subtle secrets of the director of souls, I have attained to great consolations, and re-established inward peace by reading and meditating much those verses, the sweetest of the *Imitation*:

Excedunt enim spirituales consolationes omnis mundi delicias, et carnis voluptates.

Nam omnes deliciae mundanae aut vanae sunt aut turpes.”

The temper of the Preacher is not the temper of thirty years. Immediate anx-

Spiritual
dryness

12	A C I T I Z E N O F
The cares of this world	<p>ieties beset him. In 1885 the six months of civil war, the isolation of the capital and the dependence on paper money had brought about a financial crisis that ruined his father; another recurred in 1894. From one day to the next he could not be sure of a friend to whom he might turn. A series of short stories, written before this, had been lost in the <i>Amérique</i>, irretrievably as it proved. He had not the opportunity or the long constancy of purpose necessary to replace these: he used, however, some of the material in the draught of a novel, never to be finished, called <i>De Sobremesa</i>. The fragment on madness and suicide in which some have thought to foresee his ending, was not in the least autobiographical; it belongs to this <i>Table-Talk</i>, and was evoked by the news of Maupassant's insanity.</p> <p>He spoke often, indeed, of death, and of self-destruction, quoting Maurice Barrès' saying, "They kill themselves for lack of imagination." He said, himself: "A man dies of suicide as of typhus, both are infectious." For insanity was not rare in the</p>
IV	B R Y N M A W R N O T E S

Difuntos

THE TWILIGHT

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thin air and cold of Bogota, and to say that a neighbour was mad, a familiar recourse of slanderous and social malice.

The place seems, indeed, in certain aspects, melancholy enough, grey, chill, and foggy as Bruges, while, as in the *Dia de Dafuntos*, the mist falls drop by drop, enwrapping the dark city, and the grieving bells speak to the living of the dead. The mood is found concentrated in *Triste*, of which the substance is somewhat as follows:

When fate, whenever it likes, mingles *Triste*
with our lives the pains, afore-time un-
guessed, of absence and death,
And, wrapped in mystery, with startling
speed depart, friends to the burial ground,
illusions into the dark,
Tenderness' poignant voice, that throbs as
through the dark of night a distant bell,
Brings up lost memories that waken occult
sounds amid the ruin of years:
And with short swallow-flights, through the
dark, come dreams of pain and cold,
Till some far-off, consoling thought com-
mences with our distress the great con-
fused dialogue of the tombs and the skies.

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A dialogue
of the tomb
and the
sky

The dialogue was ringing in his ears. Yet it would have taken no more than a little good luck, a little sun, to avert the end. In the spring of 1896 he was sick with pain and anon it was mortal; he was tossing on what the Prayer-Book calls the waves of this troublesome world, and suddenly the deep waters went over his soul. He said of himself: "An intellectual culture, undertaken without method and with insane pretensions to universality, an intellectual culture which has ended in the lack of all faith, in the scorn of every human limitation, in an ardent curiosity of evil, in desire to try all possible experience of life—all this has completed the work of the other influences" and he has become a mere mechanism of pain.

An inno-
vator

Little as he left, Silva is still, perhaps, the most entirely poet of any Hispano-American. The verse of Rubén Darío, beside his, is like a Japanese print beside a mediaeval illumination, it seems flimsy, facile and colourless. The progress, throughout those few poor years which are allowed him, in perfection even, is less than

in intellectual content, and it breaks off at the mere first-fruits. He begins with the *Lied*, masters the *Alexandrine*, and ends in sustained and powerful *vers libre*.

In poetry he was an innovator, not solely in the choice of themes, the intimacy and charm of interiors, the nursery lore so delicately touched, in the preoccupation with death, in the sense for the voice of things; nor yet was his peculiar excellence chiefly in his feeling, exquisite and instinctive, for half-tones and half-lights. In his verse he was even more modern, enlarging and enriching the rigid classical possibilities and the vague romantic conventionalities of the forms which he inherited.

He was not, indeed, like our best poets at this moment, an imagist quite, but he was a symbolist: and the texture and cadence of his poetry as the sound conveys it or the inward ear apprehends it, has the same value as the names of things, and more value than the descriptive epithet. For that reason every translation is foredoomed to displease the translator first

16	A CITIZEN OF
Timbre and overtones	<p>of all. But even without the sonorous and magical harmonies, so much remains, by virtue precisely of his symbolic use of language, and power to evoke mysterious and distant reverberations in the soul, in the employment of words like <i>old</i> and <i>shadow</i>, <i>death</i> and <i>dreams</i>, the sounding of bells, the echoing of voices. With the majestic line</p> <p><i>¡O voces silenciosas de los muertos!</i></p> <p>he opens a translation, that rather betters the original, of Tennyson's <i>When the Dumb Hour Clothed in Black</i>. Each poem has a formal and living beauty of its own, whether spoken or seen, like that one which he copied out on parchment with illuminations (as Peter Cristus once copied a leaf of miniature from Bruges into the background of a portrait), for one who though no poet was a lover of all beauty and a chosen friend of poets.</p>
The Old Things	<p><i>Viejeces</i>, that transcript was called, <i>The Old Things</i>: the title of the poem is the very same that, in the middle nineties, Mr. <u>James</u> tried for a novel, and gave up re-</p>
IV	B R Y N M A W R N O T E S

VEJECES

luctantly. The dimmed lights, the hushed fragrances, the faded tones, the dust on musical instruments, evoke the very striking of that luxurious and long-past hour. *Taller Moderno* might be the identical studio, with its Tiepolo in the distant ceiling, of Mr. James's contemporaneous tale of *Collaboration*. The rusty gold, the long dim evenings, and dusky hours on winter afternoons, were grateful to the dying century, were soothing to sick nerves. *Midnight Dreams*, the English phrase, affords the title for another very characteristic piece, of which it is hard to remember, in the completeness of the picture, the slow movement, the charged atmosphere, that it contains but two more lines than a sonnet.

Contem-
porary,
American,
akin in
feeling

*Tonight, being half asleep and solitary,
My dreams of other times appeared to me;
The dreams of hopes, glories and raptures
fine,
And happinesses that were never mine.
So they drew near in slow procession
Peopling the corners of the dark room soon;
There was grave silence then in all the place,
And the clock stayed its pendulum a space.*

18	A CITIZEN OF
<p>Overtones</p>	<p><i>The sweetness vague of a forgot perfume Spoke of the past like a ghost come i' the room, Faces I saw the grave has long since gotten, Voices I heard, where once heard I have forgotten The dreams drew near, and saw that I was sleeping, Then they withdrew, absolute silence keeping, And, touching not the pillow's silken braid, Dissolved and drifted off into the shade.</i></p> <p>With a different range of subjects and images, Silva yet recalls Verlaine in his infallible ear for overtones, both musical and emotional. His instrument is the <i>viole d'amore</i>, which is strung with a second set of silver strings beneath, never struck, that yet sound to the voice of things. It will recall to English-speaking readers the English poetry of his contemporaries, the soft-dropping cadences of Arthur Symons, the metrical strangeness and beauty of Lionel Johnson, the luxurious polyphony of Ernest Dowson.</p>
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The influence of Heine, which he felt only on the lyrical and ironic side, was both superficial and transient, but it possibly affected the quatrains and the sentiment of some early pieces, like *Laughter and Tears*. Heine

*Together we laughed one day,
Aye, and we laughed so long
That all the laughter was fey
And turned to weeping strong.*

*Together at eventide
We wept, we wept so long
That we kept, when tears were dried,
A mysterious song.*

*Deep sighs rise from the feast
Between hot cup and cup,
And in salt water of seas
Pale pearls grow up.*

On the next page, however, the measure begins to complicate and turn upon itself, with the syncopated rhythms of the short lines, in the piece called *Fixed Stars*, and the *ritardando* at the end of each verse:

20	A CITIZEN OF
Byron	<p><i>When I have done With life, body and soul, And sleep in the grave The longest night of the whole,</i></p> <p><i>Remembering of things The endless bewildering maze, My eyes shall keep, like a dream, The mild light of your gaze.</i></p> <p><i>As they rot and rot Down in the dark grave's room, They will know, in death's unknown, Your eyes that hang in the gloom.</i></p> <p>The culmination of this period is the poem <i>Resurrections</i>, which is still preoccupied with the horrors of mortality. The escape is provided, however, for the imagination, and though not precisely reminiscent now, the piece yet remains still in the same mood with Leopardi.</p> <p><i>Like nature's self Cradle and grave eternal of all things, The soul has occult powers, Silences, lights, musics and shadowings.</i></p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

*Over an essence eterne
 Unstable passings-by of forms that
 shrink:
 And unknown breasts
 Where life and death utterly interlink.*

*Dank leaves are born
 Where in a grave have rotted body and
 bone;
 And adorations new
 On altars from the broken altar-stone.*

and
 Leopardi

With this disappears, except for satiric use, the *Lied*. Longer measures are wanted, and more various, and above all more variable. The sonnet is treated sometimes like a short ode, as though the fourteen lines were accidental, like the length of a crystal of amethyst, the shape and the colour being the main concern. "Verse is a holy cup," he wrote once, "put there a pure thought only." The long and short lines alternate within a single poem in the stanza structure, as in the adorable *Maderos de S. Juan*, which is a sort of gavotte composed on the theme of a folk-song or nursery game. Lastly, the

22	A C I T I Z E N O F
The Poem	<p>stanza disappears, lines drag out or dwindle at will, the music changes to keep step with the dancers dancing in tune. He never, however, quite abandoned the long splendid couplet, which is flexible as chain mail, that Chapman and Morris both could wear, yet in which they fell short always of the supreme perfection. His finest example of the measure describes how a poem is made.</p> <p><i>I thought once with new art a poem to fashion, Nervous and novel, daring, full of passion. Dallying awhile betwixt grotesque and tragic I called up all the rhythms by runes of magic. Indocile rhythms drew nearer in the room, Flying and seeking each other in the gloom, Sonorous rhythms, grave rhythms and strong, Some like a shock of arms, some like birds' song. From orient unto west, from south to north, Of metres and of forms the host came forth: Under frail bridles champng bits of gold Crossed and recrossed the tercets manifold;</i></p>
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*Wide passage through the throng then
opening*

*In gold and purple came the Sonnet, King,
Until all sang . . . And in the merry din,
My fancy caught by coquetry therein,
One sharp stanza stirred me, threw a spell
With the clear shrilling of a little bell.*

*This of them all I chose: for wedding gear
Gave it rich rhythms, silvery and crystal
clear.*

*I told therein—shunning the mean—a tale
Tragical, subtle, and fantastical:*

*'Twas the sad story, candid, undenied,
Of a fair woman, well beloved, who died,
And, for the bitterness to taste in this,
I joined sweet syllables savouring like a
kiss,*

*Broidered phrases with gold, drew music
strange*

*Like lutes and mandolins that interchange;
Left in vague light the distances profound,
Filled with damp mist; shed melancholy
around:*

*(As swift masques at a fête, to music
dancing,
Cross and recross against dark backgrounds
glancing,*

of a
loved
woman

24	A CITIZEN OF
The critic uncomprehending	<p><i>Shrouded in words that hide them like a veil, Masked in black velvet or in satin pale)— Set, behind all, and stirred, vague implications, Mystical sentiments, human temptations. I saw that it was good with artist's pride, Scented with heliotrope, amethyst-dyed, Last showed my Poem to a critic bland: He read it thrice, said, "I don't understand."</i></p> <p>The verse of Silva is reckoned as <i>vers libre</i>, but his liberty consists not so much in defiance of the measure as in subtilizing within the measure, as in the famous line which broke like a tidal wave over Castilian verse—</p> <p><i>Ritmos sonoros, ritmos potentes, ritmos graves.</i></p> <p>While, then, his place is recognized as with the vers-librists of his age in France, it must be recalled that though French verse, with its strict syllabic structure, its fixed cesura, its alternating masculine and feminine rhymes, was in sore need</p>
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<p>of liberation, yet Spanish verse had always something nearer the flexibility of English, and, with its rapid and noble movement, its frequent elision and entire indifference to hiatus, with its recognition of assonance as not only lawful but often an additional grace, it had therefore no need of violence in disintegration.</p> <p>The great <i>Nocturne</i>, which must be so named because the author wrote three others, one at least of which is pregnant with splendid and troubling beauty, was published in a provincial weekly and was taken as a huge joke by most people. It was learned by heart and quoted in company for laughter. Yet it was really, as rhythm, in the direct tradition of Spanish verse, the only novelty being that for good reasons of his own the author counted as a single line two or three short ones. The repetition of lines, which seemed monstrous in its day, is now a commonplace, an easy resource suggested by folk-poetry and dance-song, as in the compositions for instance of Mr. Vatchell Lindsay. The general determination of the verse is</p>	<p>Spanish verse</p> <p>The direct tradition</p>
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<p>Nocturne</p>	<p>toward a four-syllable foot, disused indeed since the Greek and Latin, but quite recoverable if two trochees are run together by lightening the stress on every syllable but the third. Now trochaic measures, like dactylic, are alien to English speech, as Swinburne in a famous passage pointed out, and the following translation is hampered, in addition to other disabilities, by the stubborn tendency of English accentual verse to reverse the accent and impose anapaestic rhythms, or a jumble of broken iambs, sooner than recognize the tramp of the marching trochees. The writer despairs of conveying to any excepting those who know the poem already, the fragrant and phosphorescent splendours of the original.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>On a night</i> —<i>Night all filled with murmurings and perfumes, music, wings,—</i> <i>On a night</i> <i>When there burned in nuptial glooms and damps the fireflies' lamps,</i> <i>Slow beside me, hanging on me, silent, pale,</i></p>
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—Say, did foretastes, infinite in bitterness,

Shrivel you in the secret'st centre of your fibres?—

Down the blossomy path that led across the plain,

You proceeded:

White the moonlight,

Through the azure skies, infinite and profound, scattered around;

And your shadow

Fine and languid.

With my shadow

Thrown together by the moonlight

On the dreary gravel

Of the path, confounded,

Made but one,

Made but one,

Made but one sole shadow slowly dragging,

They were one sole shadow slowly dragging,

One sole shadow slowly dragging.

Now, at night

Alone, my spirit

Brimmed with the infinite bitterness and agony of your death,

Two
shadows

28	A CITIZEN OF
<div data-bbox="215 840 335 906">Shadows of souls</div>	<div data-bbox="425 343 1134 1576"> <p> <i>Separate from yourself by time, by the tomb and distance, By the infinite dark Where our voices cannot reach; Dumb and lone By the pathway I proceeded: And heard the dogs a-barking at the moon- shine, At the pallid moonshine, And the croaking Of the bull-frogs . . . I was cold with all the coldness that in your bed-chamber Froze your cheek, your blanchéd temples and your hands belovéd, In the snowy whiteness Of your shrouds and sheets. Graveyard cold it was, the ice of death, The cold of nothingness. And my shadow Thrown before me by the moonlight, Moved alone in lonely landscape, And your shadow slim and agile, Fine and languid, As in that mild night of spring-tide per- ished, In that night of murmurings and per- fumes, music, wings,</i> </p> </div>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

*Neared and walked therewith,
 Neared and walked therewith,
 Neared and walked therewith. Oh, the mingled shadows,
 Shadows of bodies that joined with the shadows of souls,
 Shadows that seek each other in nights of sorrow and tears!*

Another form of verse which Silva employed in divers ways to ends very divergent, is a nine-syllable line made up of three feet of three syllables each. As used hitherto, it had been either too soft or too hard: he taught it a sonorous force unexpected and apparently unknown in Spanish before. In *Futura* it serves in long paragraphs for a satiric subject, the dedication of a statue to Sancho Panza as patron saint; in *Egalité* it sharpens quatrains on a theme worthy of Swift, to the effect that the porter on the corner and the Emperor of China are the same sort of animal; and in parts of *All Souls' Day* it serves for the crying and clangour of the bells. The effect of this verse is not unlike some of our English octosyllables, but more striking,

Another
verse

30	A CITIZEN OF
English parallels	<p>because in Spanish, with its acceptance of a vowelled assonance in its multitudinous double rhymes, the use of a strong masculine rhyme ending in a liquid gives extraordinary finality and power, with a sort of clang. In <i>Egalité</i> the seven stanzas have a single rhyme. <i>Futura</i> is written, like Crashaw's and Bishop King's octosyllables, in paragraphs of varying length, but rhymed at the even lines, and these, twenty-three of them, on a single vowel, the open <i>o</i>. The effect is cumulative and tremendous, charging the absurdity of the grotesque theme with a gravity that carries it over into tragi-comedy. In the <i>Día de Defuntos</i> the interlace of rhymes is most exquisite, the syllabic harmony sonorous and magnificent: nowhere, unless from the young Milton of <i>Comus</i> and <i>Lycidas</i>, could English verse supply a parallel.</p> <p>Of the poets called modernists he was the acknowledged leader, the initiator and strongest force of the movement. Perhaps the piece of his maturest work is that called <i>Día de Defuntos</i>, comparable only to an altar-frontal of enamel and niello from</p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

Limoges, flawless, gracious and grave-coloured. Of another, nearly double its length, *Al Pié de la Estatua*, which is devoted to Bolivar and inscribed to the city of Caracas, a stranger in ignorance cannot well speak, can simply note as characteristic that his most substantial work should be given to his land and to his dead. The style here is stronger, directer and more sustained than the reader would be prepared for: the clear air, the white light, the unalterable bronze against the sky, the blond children on the grass, support rather than adorn it; the only metaphor detachable being that comparison between the great man who "gave liberty to a continent and to the Spanish dominion a grave," and an immense planet:

*As on mild and lovely nights Jupiter,
crowned with lightnings, makes pale in
empty space the sidereal light of the stars.*

Critics who know more about each other's writings than those of poets, have suggested a comparison between Edgar A. Poe's *Bells* and those of the *Dia de Di-*

At the foot
of the
statue

In. Green
 whose own
 French!
 ISTAKEN
 CORRECTION
 ACCENT OF
 ESPRIT

32	A CITIZEN OF
All Souls' Day	<p><i>funtos. There is no ground for such. Poe's is a <i>jeu d'esprit</i>, Silva's a meditation on life and death. In Bogota, as in many other places, the bells on All Souls' Day are rung incessantly for twenty-four hours. No one who has not lived in a city full of the sound of bells, and listened to their voices and understood their speech, could so well interpret them, "the grieving bells, that speak to the living of the dead."</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> <i>Thick the day—the light is old— The fine rains fall and soak With penetrant threads the city deserted and cold: A dark thick lethal melancholy cloak, In the shadowy air, invisible hands unfold. There is none but shrinks, leaving his word unspoke, Seeing the grey mist through the sombre air unrolled; Hearing still, far overhead Dark and grievous, uttered With a pause and with a stammer, Dreary accents of misgiving,— All the bells that cry and clamour, Grieving bells that tell the living Of the dead.</i> </p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

*Something there is, anxious, dubitable,
Mingling its outcry in the enormous din,
Striking a discord through the according
swell*

*With which the bronze bells toll and toll the
knell*

For all those that have been.

*It is the voice of the bell
That strikes the hour of the day,
Equal, sonorous, rhythmical,
Today as yesterday;
And here is a bell that complains,
Another is weeping there,
This with an aged woman's pains.
And that like a child in prayer.*

*The bigger bells that ring a double chime
Sound with an accent of mystical scorn;
But the bell that tells the time
Is laughing, not forlorn.*

*In its dry timbre are subtle harmonies,
Its voice bespeaks holidays, jollities,
Appointments, pleasures, dancing and song,
The things that we think about all day long.
'Tis a mundane voice in a choir of friars,
And laughing the light notes fall,
Mocking and skeptical,
At the bell that groans
At the bell that moans,*

The town
clock

34	A CITIZEN OF
The church bells	<p><i>And all that the choirs of bells recall; And with its ring-ting-ting It measures the sorrows of all, The time when each grief tires And the end of sorrowing.</i></p> <p><i>Therefore it laughs at the great bell overhead That tolls and tolls its endless knell for the dead; Therefore it interrupts the voices strong With which the christened metal grieves for the dead so long. Listen not, bronzes, listen not, O bells, That with deep voices clamouring call to mind, Pray for the beings that sleep in their shells, Away from life, freed from desiring, Far from hard battles of the human kind; Swing in the air and tumble untiring, Listen not, bells Against the impossible what avails our desiring?</i></p> <p><i>Up aloft rings, rhythmical and sonorous, That voice of gold, And unabashed by the prayer of her sisters old That pray in chorus,</i></p>
IV	BRYN MAWR NOTES

*The bell of the clock
 Rings and rings, rings on yet,
 Saying: "I set
 With sonorous vibration
 The hour of the forgotten;"*
*That after the shock
 And the black congregation
 Of relatives gotten
 Together and sighing,
 While over the bier
 With white lilies dying
 The candles burn clear;
 That after the grief
 And the sobbing and wailing,
 The utterance brief
 And the tears unavailing—
 Then the moment it sets
 When weeds are a weariness,
 And thought turns again
 From the dead, from regrets,
 From languor and dreariness,
 After six months, or ten.*

Mourning

*And today, the Day of the Dead, as melan-
 choly awoke,
 Brooding in the grey mists that oppress
 And the fine rains that fall and soak
 Racking the nerves with dolour and distress,
 Wrapping the dark city as in a cloak:*

Pleasure

*The clock, that marked the hour and the day
When in each empty house they laid away
Their mourning brief and came out brave
and gay:*

*The clock that marked the hour of the ball
For which, at a year's end, a girl put on
Her delicate frock—forgotten and alone
The mother sleeping by the churchyard
wall;—*

*Rings on, indifferent to the urgencies
Of the great bell that calls, calls all the
while;*

*The clock that marked when came the hour
precise*

*That upon lips where grief had set a seal,
Back as though by enchantment came the
smile,*

*Then in brief space light laughter, peal on
peal;*

*That marked the hour in which a widower
Was mentioning suicide, asking arsenic,
While in the once-perfuméd bed-chamber
The smell of phenic acid made one sick,
That marked the hour once when, over-
fraught*

*With ecstasy, he wedded; again, when he
To the same church another bride had
brought;*

*The clock knows nothing of the mystery
 Of all these complaints that people the grey air,
 And sees in life nothing but jollity,
 And goes on marking with indifferent care,
 The same enthusiasm, the same light graces,
 The flight of time which everything effaces.
 This is that anxious tone and dubitable
 That floats in the enormous din.
 This the ironic note that throbs in the swell
 With which the bronze bells toll and toll the
 knell
 For all those that have been.*

*'Tis the fine and subtle voice
 Vibrating and crystalline
 With an accent like a boy's
 Indifferent to good and ill,
 That marks the shameful hour, still,
 The fatal hour, the hour divine.
 Ringing still far overhead,
 Pealing, rhythmic, and sonorous,
 Never echoing the misgiving
 Dark and grievous, uttered
 With a pause and with a stammer
 Of the sad mysterious chorus,
 Of the bells that cry and clamour—
 Grieving bells that tell the living
 Of the dead.*

Hours
 of shame,
 of doom, or
 of ecstasy

38	J O S É A . S I L V A
Escape from life	<p data-bbox="383 333 1125 662">At thirty years old, when he died, he had already written what cannot be matched upon his continent, nor indeed precisely in the hemisphere, and he was only at the beginnings of his art. His tragedy seems so simple, and so unnecessary.</p> <p data-bbox="383 671 1125 1437">Poetry had the least of him, but the best. If he had lived through this ferment only a year or two more, till the pressure of money cares had relaxed, till incessant reading and study had brought a kind of satiety, till the sharpness of grief had worn down, till the bitterness of disappointment had diminished: if he could only for a little while have escaped from life, as many a man has done without the irretrievable step through the door of death; if he could only, in short, have been a poet by profession! Art for art's sake is a good creed, for more than most things art brings consolation and healing, art occupies and fortifies.</p>
IV	B R Y N M A W R N O T E S



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